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## SOME SOCIAL EFFECTS OF A REFORM MOVEMENT

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BY FRANKLIN SPENCER EDMONDS, ESQ.,

Former Chairman of the City Committee, City Party, Philadelphia.

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When a community is passing through the strain and stress of a reform wave, ordinarily the signs are to be found in the political legislation that may be the subject of controversy, or in the character of the individuals who become candidates for public office. These political effects are the direct and logical outcome of the popular attention which has been directed to the problems of government. Political change, of some sort, is the immediate subject of controversy; one side demands, and the other refuses; one group attacks and the other defends. And when the movement has attained unto its culmination, there results a general advance in political conditions that, for the time, may content the educated public sentiment which has inspired the movement.

But there are also social and business effects, just as logical as the political manifestations, although not directly the subject of controversy at the polls, and these too should be analyzed and studied. A reform movement is generally preceded by a period of political calm, during which conditions are quiet, static and reposeful. Generally this stage is characterized by the ascendancy of a well-organized party machine. It may safely be maintained that such an ascendancy, wholly regardless of the legislation which the machine may urge, or the methods whereby it maintains control, or the character of men whom it may select for office—disregarding these factors, important as they are—is un-American, and, in the long run, detrimental to the character of those who live under its sway.

Let us conceive of a political machine wholly benevolent in its activities, with a sincere desire for good laws, upright candidates and public approval. Such a condition is usually found during the first years of the history of the machine, when its early struggles necessitate a respectful recognition of the power of the people. The essential vice of the machine is at once apparent

—it is “government for the people,” but not “government by the people.” Its continuing tendency is to divide all citizens into two classes: politicians and others, the rulers and the ruled, the professionals and the amateurs. Now, the reformer admits the tendency in the industrial world towards specialization and division of labor; he recognizes, as must every sensible man, that in the professions and the arts each successful worker tries to limit his particular activity to but one field. But he insists, and this insistence lies at the basis of all reform movements, that in politics, as in religion, an active participation is demanded of each citizen, not necessarily because the mass can determine political questions more wisely than the professionals, but because activity in politics is essential to the complete education of the citizen; it is a part of the experience of the human race which one cannot acquire by proxy—it is the only efficient safeguard of free institutions.

In this distinction lies the fundamental distinction between the machine and reform. The former demands that the people shall not attack it so long as it is good; the latter demands, “not that the machine be good, but that it be gone,” because its mere existence is a continual temptation to the broad, easy, but wrong way of government.

If this argument be sound, it is not necessary to enter into the reasons for attacking the machine, when in the natural course of events it ceases to be benevolent and becomes selfish. Having obtained power, the next step is to secure the benefits of power. Then comes the sad tale of corruption and mismanagement which inevitably bring reform, as a natural reaction, coming first as public retribution for wrongdoing, and later asserting a better and higher way of transacting public business. Sometimes in its turn the reform movement becomes a machine, and must be attacked. Sometimes the old machine, chastened and subdued, but filled with a marvelous vitality, is able to regain its footing. Whatever the sequence, the world has advanced, conditions have improved, and public life will never again return to its former state.

It is, therefore, evident that the chief social good which results from a political upheaval is to be found in the stress which such a movement rightly causes to be placed upon the political importance of the individual. A reform campaign is necessarily based on gen-

eral education in political methods. Herein lies the distinction between a reform movement and a factional fight. In the latter, the band of trained workers is separated into two camps, and then there is a battle for the supremacy. But in the former, new men—citizens, business men, those who follow the professions and the arts—first educate themselves in the methods of politics and then take their place as fighters in the ranks. It is not too much to say that in Philadelphia, as a result of the recent upheaval, there are now twenty thousand citizens who know how to organize primaries, conduct elections, canvass divisions, serve in conventions, etc., who two years ago would have been absolutely helpless, and hence ineffective in any political affair. This diffusion of political knowledge, wholly aside from the purposes to which it is applied, cannot but mean a great advance in social power.

As a necessary corollary to this first consideration under a reform movement the individual citizen finds his natural political position stronger and more important. Under the static conditions of machine rule, a routine is developed, and rare indeed is the man who can break it down. Promotion, political recognition, and influence come primarily, if not indeed wholly, as the result of loyalty to this established routine. The prime qualifications for one who seeks advancement is that he will "take orders." Now a reform wave establishes a dynamic condition of society. Politics are thrown into confusion, and the routine breaks down. Leaders who have long held power because of the existence of a political routine in which they have become parts of the machinery, find themselves obliged to stand alone without this artificial support. In a day a leader may be relegated to oblivion, because his strength under static conditions becomes an irredeemable weakness under the pressure of progress. It cannot be denied but that this sluffing off of old leaders is a great social good, especially as it affords opportunity for new men, identified with new ideas and in touch with new conditions, to come to the front. Any change in social conditions which will free individuals from routine is to be welcomed, especially as it affords an opportunity for strong men to assert and prove their strength.

Moreover, a political upheaval furnishes a rare opportunity to present new ideas in legislation, and to secure their enactment. When the political pulse is excited, when the people generally are

watching closely the course of events, the shrewd leader will use every means in his power to convince the community that he himself is no obstacle to progress. It is amazing to consider the character of laws passed sometimes in obedience to public sentiment. The Pennsylvania legislature of 1905 passed the Ripper Bill and refused personal registration. Twelve months later the same body of men repealed the Ripper Bill and enacted personal registration with enthusiasm and alacrity. Under such conditions the social reformer has at last his innings. He may urge the consideration of a bill to establish his particular ideal, and his arguments and protests may fall upon deaf and mocking ears, but when reform comes, not only the reformers, but also his previous opponents, join hands to do him honor, each seeking to secure the advertisement and the prestige which comes from aid given to a worthy cause.

In a general way, therefore, a reform movement first educates the people; second, re-forms the lines, giving more opportunity to the individual to find his proper rank; and, third, opens an easy way for new ideas to be made effective in legislation.

In considering the effects upon general business life, a variety of forces operates to cause confusion. Many business men condemn the frequency of elections and deprecate the absorption of their fellows in the business of society, rather than in their individual affairs. Moreover, their business may bring them into intimate relations with the departments of government, and they may even prefer the static conditions dominated by a well-oiled machine to the uncertainties which attend a reform movement. It is easier to make a contract with a despot than with a mob, and those who furnish the public utilities are among the loudest in their protest against the futility of reform. Even the average business man, who has nothing to do with governmental contracts or franchises, is apt to resent a movement in which, in order to satisfy his own conscience, he must take time and money from his own work and invest them for the social welfare. "I shall do no more for reform," declared a prominent business man who had been a leader in a successful movement. "I find that it is cheaper for me to keep to my own work and pay higher taxes. I will make more money in the long run." This individualistic point of view is, beyond all question, representative of the attitude of a large group of business men. But there is a far larger number, generally younger men, who cannot content

their consciences with this comforting sophism and also who enjoy politics as an avocation, rejoicing in its strain and stress, the power that it brings and the training that it necessitates. This latter group illustrates the reformer's point of view by asserting the principle that every man must take from his business sufficient time to enable him to attend to the business of society, or else free government is impossible.

Reform has been found to be commercially profitable. The alert business man recognizes, in any improvement in the conditions of the society in which he works, an excellent advertisement for himself and his business. It is better for the salesman if he come from a community where the people have a reputation for enlightenment than for ignorance. It is better for him to represent a community that is alert and active rather than one debased and slothful. It was stated by a Philadelphia manufacturer who, because of his views on national political issues, had been inactive in local contests, that since the political upheaval of 1905, his salesmen reported to him that in traveling through the West they found a greater esteem for Philadelphia and a more complete recognition of their own ability. There can be no question but that this increased appreciation is a direct and valuable business asset. It is possible, however, that a reform wave, especially if it be founded upon the criticism of the existing provision of public service utilities, may pass beyond the bounds of business prudence and thereby cause a disturbance in the financial market, from which far-reaching results may follow. Some of the municipal reform movements have been based upon the belief in public ownership of such utilities. As a natural result of this theory the vested financial interests have everywhere opposed reform and attacked its representatives. Under these circumstances the triumph of the reform movement would necessarily affect stock values and possibly produce economic disturbances. But where the reform movement is based upon the general desire of the body of the people for participation in the business of government, where it follows the lines indicated in the earlier part of this article, there need be no disturbance of business conditions except as is caused by a change in the individual program of each business man.

It is noteworthy that many of the men who entered public life as the exponents of reform have continued in politics as the parti-

sans of machine rule. This would suggest that possibly the chief advantage of a reform movement is to be found in the overturning of existing conditions and hence in the opportunity that is afforded to each man to find his own niche. However long the reform movement may continue, its results are first measured by the legislation which it secures. But in the long run, the test of its success must be found in its effect on the character of the people. If it finds the people sunk in political sloth, and leaves them in the same general condition, then, even if a body of legislation has been enacted, it will not be long before political conditions are as bad under the new laws as they were previously under the old. It does not take long for the skilled politician to devise a means of evading reform laws. Indeed, some claim that reform legislation always harms the reformers more than their ingenious opponents. If, therefore, the only effects are political, the social advance will not be great. But if the reform movement has taught the people their rights and trained them to become active participants in the political battle—if it has revealed to them the mysteries of political technique, so as to save them from being duped—then the effects will be felt through all time to come, not only in the political arena, but in the aggressive spirit which, being once quickened, will be manifested in every phase of life.